

**U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2465 S. Townsend Ave.
Montrose, CO 81401**

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2012-0029 EA

Location: All BLM Public Lands within Uncompahgre Field Office, including Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and the portion of the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area that is within the Uncompahgre Field Office. Located in Western Colorado within the San Miguel, Montrose, Delta, Mesa, Ouray, and Gunnison counties.

Project Name: Programmatic Environmental Analysis (EA) for the Integrated Weed Management Treatments

Applicant: BLM

Background

The BLM Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) has completed a preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA), # DOI-BLM-CO-S050-2012-0029, which analyses the effects of a variety of methods of noxious and invasive weed control, including herbicide, biological, manual, mechanical, and fire.

The EA is tiered to the 2007 "Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS)" and the 2007 "Vegetation Treatments on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States Programmatic Environmental Report (PER)".

Noxious weeds are non-native plant species that are capable of becoming detrimental, destructive, and difficult to control in native ecosystems. A noxious weed is any plant designated by a federal, state, or county government to be injurious to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or any public or private property (Sheley and Petroff 1999).

Noxious and invasive weeds are a concern in the Uncompahgre Field Office (UFO) due to increases in the number, size, and distribution of infestations resulting from both human-caused and natural disturbances. Weed proliferation has contributed to a downward trend in the health of native plant communities in portions of the UFO.

On November 10, 2009 scoping letters were sent to various members of the public, organizations, and elected officials. In response, the BLM received five comment letters.

Three of the letters were in support of Integrated Weed Management including the use of herbicides, and two of the letters were in support of Integrated Weed Management without the use of herbicides. The concerns brought forward in the two letters opposing the use of herbicides were the contamination of water sources, a concern for the wildlife and livestock in the area, and the jeopardizing of a natural grass fed beef label.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in DOI-BLM-S050-2012-0029 EA, I have determined the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The proposed action includes design features, Standard Operating Procedures, Best Management Practices, and Conservation Measures as part of the proposed action and alternative 1 to minimize the impacts on other resource values and adjacent private lands.

Rationale

This FONSI is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), with regard to the context and intensity of impacts described in the EA.

Context

The proposed action is located within the boundaries Uncompahgre Field Office, which includes the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area and part of the Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area (map 1 of the EA).

Intensity

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Beneficial impacts include reducing the potential for the establishment and spread of noxious and invasive weed species. Additional benefits include the potential stabilization and restoration of vegetative communities that are not meeting land health standards due to the presence and dominance of noxious and invasive species. Adverse impacts could include temporary closures of high recreation areas while treatment is applied, short term impacts to native vegetation and wildlife, and noticeable changes in ground cover while native vegetation is recovering on the treatment site.

2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

Applications of noxious and invasive weed treatments should reduce the incidence and severity of wildfires by removing weedy species that have the ability to change fire regime, thereby protecting public safety. Adverse effects to public health and safety could include application of weed treatments near private property. To mitigate, buffers would be required between treatment areas and private property.

3) *Unique Characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The proposed action encompasses or is near to cultural resources, national and state parks, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. The Proposed Action and Alternative 1 have design features, Standard Operating Procedures, Best Management Practices, and Conservation Measures which protect unique and sensitive areas.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

Herbicide would be applied according to the label, and any herbicide used would be one analyzed and approved in the 2007 PEIS. Public perception in the use of herbicide to treat noxious and invasive species can be controversial. There are areas within the proposed project area where the public has concerns over organic farming, natural beef labels, and the introduction of herbicides into the environment. Other non-herbicidal treatments of noxious and invasive weeds seem to be better tolerated and widely accepted. Design features, Standard Operating Procedures, Best Management Practices, and Conservation Measures within the proposed action and alternative 1 should mitigate concerns.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The proposed action of using Integrated Weed Management in the treatment of noxious and invasive weeds is not unique to this area or across the Western United States. The BLM has been using Integrated Weed Management techniques with success and failures, contributing to better applications and management across public lands. The 2007 PEIS analyzed and approved the herbicides that would be used – the effects are understood; application would be made according to the label. Other treatment methods do not have unique, uncertain or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

Approval of Integrated Weed Management practices in the proposed action of alternative 1 would not create a precedent. BLM has been directed and is mandated by several laws to treat noxious invasive weeds.

7) *Consideration of the action in relation to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Other projects, including other noxious invasive weed treatments, are foreseeable. Considering past and foreseeable projects, it is not anticipated that cumulative impacts of significance would occur. The limited scale of activity creates minimal individual effects, as well as minimal cumulative effects when added to the existing situation and other potential activities.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.*

The proposed action has very low potential to impact eligible cultural properties. Generally, application of herbicides should have no impacts to these places, while the use of prescribed fire and mechanical vegetation treatments could impact some vulnerable properties; however,

individual vegetation treatment projects would be evaluated prior to implementation of surface disturbing treatments, and the appropriate avoidance or mitigation strategy would be implemented.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat.*

All treatment methods have the potential to impact special status plants. Conservation measures are part of the action, which are designed to reduce or eliminate impact. In the long term, there would be beneficial effects.

The UFO consulted with the USFWS during development of this programmatic EA, as required by Section 7 of the ESA. The BLM prepared a Biological Assessment to evaluate likely impacts to federally listed or proposed threatened or endangered species (BLM 2012). The BA reached a determination of "**May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect**" for the Colorado hookless cactus, Clay-loving Wild Buckwheat, Canada lynx and the seven "big river" fish species. Also, the BA reached a determination of not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Gunnison sage-grouse, and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify proposed critical habitat. The determinations were based on the need to manage weeds that either are threatening the species or are limiting the species via competitive exclusion and plant community degradation. BLM and USFWS developed specific Standard Operating Procedures and conservation measures for avoiding or minimizing impacts to these species.

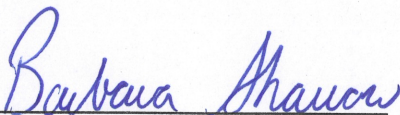
10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The Proposed Action does not violate or threaten violation of any federal, state, local, or tribal law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Determination

This Finding of No Significant Impact is based on the information contained in the EA and my consideration of criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27). It is my determination that: 1) the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts; 2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the Uncompahgre Basin, San Juan/San Miguel, and the Gunnison Gorge NCA Resource Management Plans; and 3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not necessary.

Approved:


Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

8-20-13
Date